

News From Congressman Joe Sestak

eNewsletter –November 23, 2009

Dear Constituents of the 7th District,

Our efforts both in Washington and here in the 7th District to overcome the economic challenges we face together continue. This month I am proud to have cast my vote to help the House of Representatives pass a healthcare reform bill that addresses our moral imperative to provide access to affordable, quality healthcare, and an economic necessity. If we do not act, America will be spending one fifth of its GDP on health care by 2019. Meanwhile, individuals' annual health insurance premiums are over \$400 more expensive because of costs for the uninsured.

I ran for Congress to repay the debt I owed to the American people. After 31 years in the Navy, my daughter developed a brain tumor. It was because of the health plan I received as a member of the armed services that I did not have to worry about her care and she was able to beat her cancer. Members of our military can focus on their mission knowing that their families are taken care of back home because of the health plan we receive. I firmly believe that this bill helps American workers do just the same. It is an incredibly important step to expand access to care, improve the insurance on which Americans currently rely and address costs in the long term.

In my District, this bill will improve coverage for those who have it, provide coverage for 8,000 uninsured, improve Medicare for 11,000 beneficiaries – including closing the prescription drug donut hole for 11,200 seniors – and protect 500 families from bankruptcy caused by skyrocketing health costs.

As we take the final steps toward the requirement of real health insurance reform, we cannot lose sight of work still to be done to rebuild our economy. It is not enough to just have Wall Street hit 10,000. If we are serious about a recovery that benefits everyone, we have to do more to support small and start-up businesses. I have introduced the JOBS Act to incentivize small business job creation because although these companies are not represented in the Dow Jones, their success is critical to affecting our most important economic indicator - employment. In addition, I have held a number of events to continue to advocate for investment in clean energy industries, which generated 8.5 million jobs in the United States in 2006 alone.

Preventing the Spread of Swine Flu

On October 12th, I visited the Delcroft School in Folcroft where I spoke to students in first through fifth grade about the importance of preventive measures in order to protect themselves from the novel H1N1 flu. I urge all of my constituents to take three steps to preventing the spread of a disease that is impacting so many. First, take the time to get a flu shot. Second, take everyday preventive actions like washing your hands, coughing into the bend of your elbow, and not sharing personal items. And finally, if you do become sick, follow your doctor's recommendations including staying home until you are fully recovered and taking antiviral medications if necessary.

Congressman Joe Sestak is now on Twitter. You can receive updates on the Congressman's daily events as well as links to information about legislation, YouTube clips and photographs from around the District. Sign up at <http://www.twitter.com/JoeSestak>.

*For the most complete and up-to-date information on Congressman Sestak's work in Washington and in the 7th Congressional District, please visit <http://sestak.house.gov>.

For help with a problem for which the Congressman can offer assistance, please call his District Office at 610-892-8623.

Ensuring Access to Affordable, High Quality Health Insurance for All Americans

In a rare Saturday session, I was proud to cast my vote in favor of H.R. 3692, the Affordable Health Care for America Act (AHCAA), which passed the House of Representatives by the vote of 220 – 215. This bill ensures affordable health coverage for the 36 million Americans otherwise uninsured, institutes market reforms to make health insurance more competitive and more affordable for individuals and small businesses, all while reducing the federal deficit by \$109 billion over the next ten years. For individuals who like the insurance they have, this bill only helps ensure they can continue to afford it. It establishes a fair, competitive marketplace for insurance in which coverage is guaranteed and a public option with the same regulations as private plans provides the competition to drive down costs. Insurance companies can no longer make life and death decisions.

On November 7th, I spoke on the House Floor in favor of health care reform during the debate on H.R. 3962, the Affordable Health Care for America Act: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BDKP_yTFUc

For more information on the health care legislation which the House passed on November 7th, you can visit: <http://www.sestak.house.gov/healthcare/>

Relief for American Workers hit hardest by economic turmoil: I have introduced legislation to extend health insurance assistance to unemployed workers affected by the economic recession included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The Extended COBRA Continuation

Protection Act of 2009 extends by six months a provision that provides 65% of COBRA health insurance premiums for individuals involuntarily terminated during the economic recession and also allows continued enrollment in the plan until December 31

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, 2010. We need to provide continued assistance to these men and women until we get this economy moving back in the right direction.

http://www.sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/091023_WorkerEmergencyCare.shtml

Creating Jobs

Proposing a needed JOBS bill: With our nation's unemployment rising above ten percent, I introduced legislation to help reward businesses that invest in new jobs and extend working hours as we continue to grow our way out of the recent economic downturn. The Jobs Opportunity and Business Stability (JOBS) Act of 2009 will provide refundable tax credits to small businesses with less than 50 employees and less than \$5 million in gross receipts for adding jobs, adding hours, and raising wages. These investments will help boost our gross domestic product, resulting in increased revenues to put toward paying down the deficit, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

Without further action, our country's unemployment will remain high until 2012 -- rising above 12 percent. As Vice Chairman of the House Small Business Committee, I understand that we

must assist small businesses, which create more than 70 percent of our jobs, to ensure we have an economic recovery that benefits everyone.

Spurring the creation of quality, well-paying green jobs with clean energy investment: Investments in green technology are important not only to increase our long-term sustainability, but also to provide opportunities for quality jobs. In recent weeks, I was privileged to meet with green energy entrepreneurs like Community Energy, Inc. founder Brett Alderfer and educators like those in the Community College of Philadelphia's Green Jobs Training Program.

http://www.sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/091013_GreenStateSuccess.shtml

After visiting clean energy sites owned by two companies in the 7th Congressional District, Conergy and Iberdrola, it is all the more apparent that we need serious investments, both private and public, to make our economy more efficient and green. To do that we need the right combination of policies to help sustain renewable energy's momentum and the right incentives so we can create a stable market for capital investment and work to combat climate change with a home-grown American industry. In doing so, we will be creating new jobs both in Pennsylvania and across the country.

Protecting Seniors' Retirement Security

Keeping our seniors financially safe in tough economic times: Seniors' retirement security has been significantly impacted by the recession and I am pursuing a number of measures to address the economic challenges they face. Following a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report showing that seniors are now starting to pay the price for the predatory lending practices that led to our recent economic downturn, I introduced the Reverse Mortgage Elder Protection Act, which would ensure senior homeowners are better informed before they begin a reverse mortgage.

To offer needed relief to more than five million seniors, I have additionally submitted legislation to suspend the Required Minimum Distribution (RMD), a requirement to withdraw from IRA/401K accounts a minimum amount once they reach 70 ½ years old. Making withdrawals now prevents those funds from regaining value as the market improves. Without this legislation, seniors would either be forced to take out their savings at a lower value than they were before the recession, or pay stiff penalties.

Furthermore, I have put forth a long-term solution to ensure that seniors receive the assistance they deserve to cover expenses. For the first time since 1975, seniors will not receive a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) in their Social Security benefits in 2010 or 2011. However, skyrocketing healthcare costs, which represent a disproportionate amount of seniors' spending,

are among the expenditures not given proper weight for that group when the COLA is determined. The Elderly Purchasing Power Protection Act of 2009 would tie COLA to a Consumer Price Index more attuned to seniors' consumption habits. The House also took an important step toward addressing seniors' health costs by passing the Medicare Premium Fairness:

http://www.sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/090924_MedicarePremProtect.shtml

Serving our Veterans

Helping our returning service members transition to civilian life: I co-sponsored the Post 9/11 Veterans Job Training Act of 2009, which allows Veterans to pursue vocational training programs – from police academies to welding to culinary arts – under the GI Bill. Currently, the post 9/11 GI Bill, unlike every other GI Bill, does not provide benefits for Veterans participating in job training or apprenticeship programs.

On October 5th, I held a forum at the University of Pennsylvania focused on key initiatives my colleagues and I are pursuing in Washington on behalf of student Veterans to better help them

transition into civilian life: the inclusion of vocational post-secondary education programs under the GI Bill and addressing the recent difficulties with GI benefit backlogs. Read more:

http://www.sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/091005_GIBillPennDrexel.shtml

Preventing Veterans Homelessness and Incarceration: Too many of our Veterans are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with service-related stress disorders and brain injuries, only to suffer from substance abuse issues. An astounding number wind up on the streets, or find themselves behind bars. I have introduced legislation to enhance the successful HUD-VASH program, which decreases the amount Veterans without shelter must pay for housing assistance. In addition I wrote to Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki about an initiative to address medical care and rehabilitation for incarcerated Veterans, including by Veterans Courts.

http://www.sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/091108_JailedVetCare.shtml

To further these efforts, I spent part of my Veterans Day visiting with Veterans at the State Correctional Institute (SCI) in Chester and the City Team Ministries Homeless Shelter. The discussions at each location confirmed that we must better treat those who suffer from mental illnesses as they re-enter society, and stop the cycle of PTSD, addiction to drugs and alcohol, homelessness, and incarceration among our Veterans.

Affordable Access to Higher Education

Make student loans more available: On November 2nd, I was pleased to partner with the US Department of Education to present a statewide webinar which highlighted the benefits and addressed the challenges of transitioning to the Direct Student Loan Program, as stipulated in a bill I helped pass in the House. Unlike the current lender-based program, the Direct Loan program is entirely insulated from market swings and can therefore guarantee students access to low-cost federal college loans, in any economy. It will save as much as \$87 billion over ten years, with these savings to be reinvested into increased Pell grants and funding for early education programs. Financial aid representatives from about a dozen schools, including Cheyney and Widener Universities, attended the event at Temple University's Fox School of Business and Management, while even more listened by phone, following the presentation online.

http://www.sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/091102_StudentLoanWebinar.shtml

Traveling the District

Addressing topics of interest to constituents: I participated in numerous events throughout my District to provide as many constituents as possible with the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback.

On October 2nd, I hosted a roundtable with area small business owners at the Temple University

Small

Business

Development

Center

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continuing job losses and an unemployment rate on the rise, we discussed the need for more incentives for small businesses, which create 70 percent of all jobs in

America

. While there, I introduced the American Small Business Innovation Act which provides for investing in Angel Investor and Venture Capitalist programs to spur small business job creation.

http://www.sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/091002_SmallBizGrowth.shtml

On October 5th, after more than two years of persistent work to better serve the area's increasing number of uninsured and underinsured, I was proud to take part in the

opening of the
ChesPenn
Center
for Family Health at
Upper Darby

. Shortly after taking office in 2007, I met with a group of concerned and determined constituents about their community's need for a clinic. Their dedication made the project "shovel-ready" when \$1 million was allocated from the Economic Stimulus Bill.

http://www.sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/091002_SmallBizGrowth.shtml

Almost 18 months after I presented the Delaware County Community College with \$170,000 in funding for their

Advanced
Technology
Center

, I was pleased to join them on October 9
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at the grand opening of the first of two buildings in the complex. Coursework at the facility will develop students' science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills to prepare them for the globally-competitive 21st century economy.

http://www.sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/091009_DCCCandSTEM.shtml

I was fortunate to celebrate Columbus Day this year in Norristown at the 25th Anniversary Celebration of the town's Christopher Columbus Monument. The monument, while paying homage to Columbus' discovery, is also a reminder of the values that define our nation – perseverance, determination, and commitment.

http://www.sestak.house.gov/list/press/pa07_sestak/091012_25ColumbusNorristown.shtml

To recognize this year's Veterans Day, I paid homage to those who have served by speaking at the Community Interfaith Tribute to Veterans for the second year, this time in Bala Cynwyd; speaking at the Chester County Boy Scout's Veterans Day Breakfast alongside Drs. Vince and Vance Moss; and marching in the 50 th Annual Media Veterans Day Parade.

Announcements

Grants and Appropriations:

I will be soliciting appropriations requests from my District in early January. Appropriations are usually large projects submitted by non-profits organizations, companies, or local governments that are specifically placed in appropriations bills for limited purposes (i.e. not on-going operations). Forms to apply for an appropriation are available beginning in January at www.sestak.house.gov

(where you can also find examples of projects submitted last year) or by contacting the District Office at 610-892-8623 or by mail at 600 N. Jackson Street, Suite 203

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If you are interested in being emailed a form once they become available or if you have questions about the process, please contact: jason.marmon@mail.house.gov or susan.heppeler@mail.house.gov

The deadline, although not set yet, will most likely be mid-February. Once submitted, the project goes through a multistep review process and a small percentage are then included in the final spending bills in the late fall (or winter) with funding likely becoming available in spring of the following year. Because the appropriation process is limited, I encourage applicants to

pursue all funding avenues including public and private grants. If you need assistance in that area, please contact me: <http://www.sestak.house.gov/contact.shtml> .

Veterans Benefits Guide Available:

The latest edition of the VA's Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors has been released. The guide provides important updated information on changes in eligibility for VA medical care and benefits in addition to other federal benefits, including disability compensation, pension and life insurance. Major modifications include the addition of "Survivors" to the title and details on the Post-9/11 GI Bill signed into law in 2008. Visit http://www1.va.gov/opa/vadocs/current_benefits.asp for more information. Printed copies can be ordered from the Government Printing Office at \$5 a copy:
http://www.va.gov/ext_redirect.asp?url=http://bookstore.gpo.gov/actions/GetPublication.do?stocknumber=051-000-00236-9&type=1

<http://www.military.com/military-report/veterans-benefits-guide-available>